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**Subject:** POLITICO's Morning Energy: Pruitt's watershed moment — 'Secret science' policy coming — Blankenship slipping

By Kelsey Tamborrino | 04/24/2018 10:00 AM EDT

*With help from Emily Holden*

**PRUITT'S WATERSHED MOMENT:** EPA Administrator Scott Pruitt is approaching his two separate House committee hearings this week with sagging support on the hill. The make-or-break moment is approaching as once-stalwart backers begin to express concern about the controversies that have swirled in recent weeks. Republican Sen. Jim Inhofe (Okla.) - perhaps Pruitt's staunchest ally in Congress - told Pro's Anthony Adragna he thinks it's "appropriate to have a hearing in so far as any accusation having to do with his office is concerned," and he cited a report in The New York Times detailing a sweetheart deal Pruitt received on an Oklahoma City home previously owned by a lobbyist.

**Sen. Shelley Moore Capito (R-W.Va.) also thought** Thursday's hearings before the House Energy and Commerce and Appropriations committees would prove pivotal for Pruitt's long-term future in the administration. "It's really important," Capito said. "He's going to have to answer some tough questions. I'm sure they'll be put to him by both sides and we'll see what his response is."

**And Sen. John Boozman joined his two Republican colleagues** in supporting hearings by the Environment and Public Works Committee. Meanwhile, sources told Bloomberg that administration officials privately cautioned lawmakers and other conservative allies to pump the brakes on their defenses of Pruitt.

**Publicly, however, the White House stands firm** in its commitment to Pruitt. Press secretary Sarah Huckabee Sanders told reporters the administration is "continuing to review a number of the reports" about Pruitt, but noted the EPA chief "has done a good job of implementing the president's policies," particularly on deregulation and energy dominance. White House legislative affairs director Marc Short was more direct earlier Monday: "I think Scott Pruitt is doing a great job and we look forward to keeping him there as EPA administrator," he told MSNBC.

**More to come?** Earlier Monday, five senior congressional Democrats asked House Oversight Chairman Trey Gowdy to obtain further documents and hold hearings after obtaining new records they say raise "troubling" new questions about Pruitt's security expenditures. EPW ranking member Tom Carper told Anthony he had a good conversation with Gowdy regarding Pruitt, but said there was no formal bipartisan agreement to work together on an investigation. "I just gave him plenty of encouragement that he's doing the right thing," Carper said. Read more.

**WELCOME TO TUESDAY!** I'm your host Kelsey Tamborrino. Congrats to the Nuclear Energy Institute's Robert Powers, who was first to correctly guess Mary Walker was the first woman to receive the Medal of Honor. For today: Who is the last former senator to appear on a U.S. postage stamp? Send your tips, energy gossip and comments to ktamborrino@politico.com, or follow us on Twitter @kelseytam, @Morning\_Energy and @POLITICOPro.

**POLITICO's Ben White** is bringing Morning Money to the Milken Institute Global Conference to provide coverage of the day's events and evening happenings. The newsletter will run April 29 - May 2. **Sign up to keep up with your daily conference coverage.**

**BLINDED WITH SCIENCE:** EPA's Pruitt is expected to unveil his new science policy that restricts the agency from relying on research that doesn't make public all its available data, a source briefed on the announcement tells Pro's Emily Holden. The proposed rule, which the agency submitted to the White House for review last week, will mirror legislation from House Science Chairman Lamar Smith (R-Texas).

**Pruitt argues the change will bolster transparency**, but scientists and health advocates say it is an effort to constrain rulemaking. The rollout has been delayed as agency officials tried to determine how to treat industry research used to evaluate the safety of pesticides and toxic chemicals, as Pro's Annie Snider reported last week. While academic studies often can't disclose data that includes personal health records, corporations can't reveal proprietary information either.

**SCIENTISTS REACT:** Close to 1,000 scientists signed onto a letter to Pruitt Monday, calling on the administrator to reverse course on his plans to revise how the agency considers outside research. "EPA can only adequately protect our air and water and keep us safe from harmful chemicals if it takes full advantage of the wealth of scientific research that is available to the agency," write the scientists, including some former EPA career staffers. Read it here.

**A BLANK SLIP:** GOP establishment attacks on former coal baron Don Blankenship seem to be taking hold, POLITICO's Alex Isenstadt reports via new polling. With the West Virginia Senate primary a mere two weeks away, a poll out Monday found Blankenship falling behind his more mainstream rivals, GOP Rep. Evan Jenkins and state Attorney General Patrick Morrisey. The poll found Morrisey leading with 24 percent, followed by Jenkins with 20 percent, and Blankenship trailing with 12 percent.

**National Republicans have scrambled to intervene** in the race, concerned that a Blankenship primary win would destroy their prospects of defeating Democratic Sen. Joe Manchin in November. Blankenship, who spent a year in jail following the deadly 2010 explosion at his Upper Big Branch Mine, has poured nearly \$2 million of his own money into a slash-and-burn style campaign savaging Jenkins and Morrisey as pawns of the establishment, Alex writes. Blankenship has also used the Senate run as a path to clear his name. So far, much of his campaign has been geared toward portraying himself as the casualty of the Obama-era Justice Department, which he says was bent on locking him up.

**The new survey, which was conducted** April 17-April 19 and has a margin of error of 4.9 percentage points, precedes a GOP debate today, and another that will be hosted by Fox News next week for a nationally televised audience. Read more.

**SPECIAL ELECTION TODAY:** Arizona voters will decide today who will pick up the seat left vacant by Rep. Trent Franks' departure in the state's 8th District. While neither candidate highlights specific environmental issues on her campaign website, Republican Debbie Lesko and Democrat Hiral Tipirneni have markedly different takes on climate change. Tipirneni's site says she believes "climate change is real and that we need to reduce carbon emissions." Meanwhile, Lesko said during a debate earlier this year that "certainly not the majority" of climate change is human-caused. "I think it just goes through cycles and it has to do a lot with the sun. So no, I'm not a global warming proponent," she said.

**RULES TO MEET ON COLUMBIA RIVER BILL:** The House Rules Committee will meet at 5 p.m. to formulate a rule on H.R. 3144 (115), which would void the environmental impact statement process for altering the hydropower system along the Columbia and Snake rivers. Earlier this month, the 9th Circuit Court of Appeals sided with the state of Oregon, the Nez Perce tribe and conservation groups, ruling that dam operations on the Columbia and Snake rivers must forgo hydropower production during key times of the year to protect

endangered salmon. An environmental impact statement for the system has been the subject of congressional fights, with Rep. Cathy McMorris Rodgers filing the legislation to void that process.

**COAL ASH HEARING TODAY:** EPA holds a public hearing today on its proposal to roll back the Obama-era regulation for the cleanup and disposal of coal ash. The hearing will begin at 9 a.m. in Arlington, Va., where there will be three sessions: 9 a.m. until noon; another beginning at 1 p.m. and ending at 4 p.m.; and a final session beginning at 5 p.m. and ending at 8 p.m.

**PROMISES, PROMISES:** Senate spending leaders vowed to restore chamber-wide debate on amendments to individual appropriations bills, Pro's Sarah Ferris and Kaitlyn Burton report. It's a risky move, ME readers may recall, considering how Democrats blocked a largely noncontroversial Energy and Water bill in 2016 because of a proposed amendment on Iran, and in 2015, House Republicans' Interior-Environment bill was tripped up by an unrelated rider on the Confederate flag. But Senate Appropriations Chairman Richard Shelby and his Democratic counterpart Patrick Leahy told committee members in a closed-door meeting Monday that leadership has agreed to allow amendments on the Senate floor for every individual spending bill. And the two have met with Majority Leader Mitch McConnell and Minority Leader Chuck Schumer in recent days about opening up the floor for debate on spending bills.

**JUDGE: ENBRIDGE PIPELINE SHOULD STICK TO PLAN :** An administrative law judge recommended on Monday that Minnesota regulators approve Enbridge Energy's proposal for replacing its Line 3 crude oil pipeline. But the court stipulated that the pipeline should follow the existing route, not the company's preferred route, which would carry Canadian tar sands crude from Alberta across areas in the Mississippi River, the Associated Press reports. Administrative Law Judge Ann O'Reilly's recommendation to the Public Utilities Commission sets up further disputes, "because the existing line crosses two Ojibwe reservations where tribal governments have made it clear that they won't consent and want the old line removed altogether." Read more.

**A METHANE TO THE MADNESS:** The comment period on the Bureau of Land Management's proposal to reverse the Methane Waste Prevention Rule ended Monday, drawing thousands of far-reaching comments. The left-leaning Center for Western Priorities analyzed a random sample of 2,000 comments, it said, finding 99.8 percent of them were opposed to the proposal. The Independent Petroleum Association of America and Western Energy Alliance meanwhile submitted joint comments applauding the move. "We were pleased to see workable changes are being considered to the rule that more accurately represent the scope of power and authority given to the BLM for regulating this type of activity," IPAA's Dan Naatz said in a statement. And, E2, an affiliate of the Natural Resources Defense Council, sent a letter to Interior Secretary Ryan Zinke on Monday, expressing its opposition to BLM's proposal. Close to 400 businesses signed onto that letter, which calls BLM's proposal "a net negative for the American public." Read it here.

**MAIL CALL! IN HONOR OF NATIONAL PARKS WEEK:** League of Conservation Voters organized 122 groups - including the American Civil Liberties Union and the Human Rights Campaign - in a letter to members of Congress opposing the administration's moves on public lands. National monuments "have helped make our public lands more inclusive," the letter states, before calling on lawmakers to "reject any legislation that would limit the president's authority under the Antiquities Act or codify any unlawful rollbacks of existing national monuments." Read it here.

**FOR YOUR RADAR:** The House will vote to overhaul the 1988 Stafford Act this week, Pro's Budget & Appropriations team reports. The three-decade-old bill is the main piece of legislation overseeing federal disaster-relief efforts, with proposed tweaks that include new incentives to build "smarter and stronger to better withstand disasters in the future," according to GOP Majority Leader Kevin McCarthy's office. That could equate to big changes on how states spend disaster relief money.

**ICYMI: ZINKE DRAWS OLIVER'S IRE:** The Interior secretary got the full treatment from HBO host John Oliver on "Last Week Tonight" on Sunday. Oliver hit Zinke for referring to himself as a geologist and said he

"has a real flair for creative license." Of course, Zinke is not the first to draw scrutiny from the HBO host. A judge recently dismissed a defamation lawsuit brought by coal magnate Bob Murray against Oliver, who referred to Murray as a "geriatric Dr. Evil." Watch the Zinke video [here](#).

**STATE NEWS - CUOMO INTRODUCES PLASTIC BAG BILL:** New York Gov. Andrew Cuomo introduced a [bill](#) Monday to ban the use of plastic bags throughout the state, Pro New York's Danielle Muoio reports. The legislation - a long-sought promise from Cuomo - would give the state Department of Environmental Conservation jurisdiction over all matters concerning plastic bags and recycling, but comes with caveats that left some environmental advocates saying it isn't far-reaching enough. Read [more](#).

## QUICK HITS

- Trump administration official says it's a "top priority" to improve American weather forecasting model, [The Washington Post](#).
- Sources: Arrested Chevron workers could face treason charge in Venezuela, [Reuters](#).
- Trump likes coal, but that doesn't mean he's hostile to wind, [Associated Press](#).
- Halliburton writes off investment in crisis-hit Venezuela, [Financial Times](#).
- U.S. coal bailout review slows after Trump faces pushback, [Bloomberg](#).

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